



US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

No.4 Fall 1999

ONLY THREE ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED IN DEIS

In a July 20, 1999 letter to area public officials and the US 321 Citizens Advisory Committee, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) announced its decision to evaluate in detail three alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). These are an Enhanced Widening Alternative, Bypass Alternative 1, and Bypass Alternative 4. These alternatives are shown inside. Bypass Alternatives 2 and 3 have been dropped from further consideration.

Bypass Alternative 4 has a high cost and substantial natural resource and visual impacts. It will be evaluated in detail because it minimizes impacts to historic properties protected by United States Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations and has public support.

Bypass Alternative 1 will be evaluated in detail because it avoids all impacts to historic properties. The FHWA is required by law to study this alternative in detail to determine if it is feasible and prudent. The Enhanced Widening Alternative and Bypass Alternative 4 take property from protected historic resources.

The enhanced widening alternative remains the NCDOT's preferred alternative and will be identified as such in the DEIS. The selection of an alternative for implementation will not be made until the impacts of each alternative (social, environmental, and economic), as well as comments on the DEIS and from the public hearing, have been evaluated fully. Should the Town of Blowing Rock, or any citizen group, want to identify a preferred alternative, those preferences will be indicated in the DEIS.

The final decision on a federally fundable selected route will be made by the FHWA based on the DEIS, and evaluation of all input received, development of additional studies if necessary, and a recommendation by the NCDOT.

How Was This Decision Reached?

On March 8, former NCDOT Secretary Norris Tolson met with elected officials from Blowing Rock and the Citizens Advisory Committee. He presented a proposal that the US 321 project focus on an enhanced widening alternative (illustrated on page 3). A video provided updated information on the bypass alternatives and showed the enhanced widening alternative. The NCDOT asked for comments on the proposal by May 10.

Approximately 200 responses were received from citizens, including year-round residents, seasonal residents, property owners, visitors, and organizations. Approximately half of the respondents favored the Enhanced Widening Alternative. The other half preferred Bypass Alternative 4 that includes a tunnel underneath the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Some of the opponents of the Enhanced Widening Alternative suggested that nothing needed to be done to improve transportation mobility along US 321.

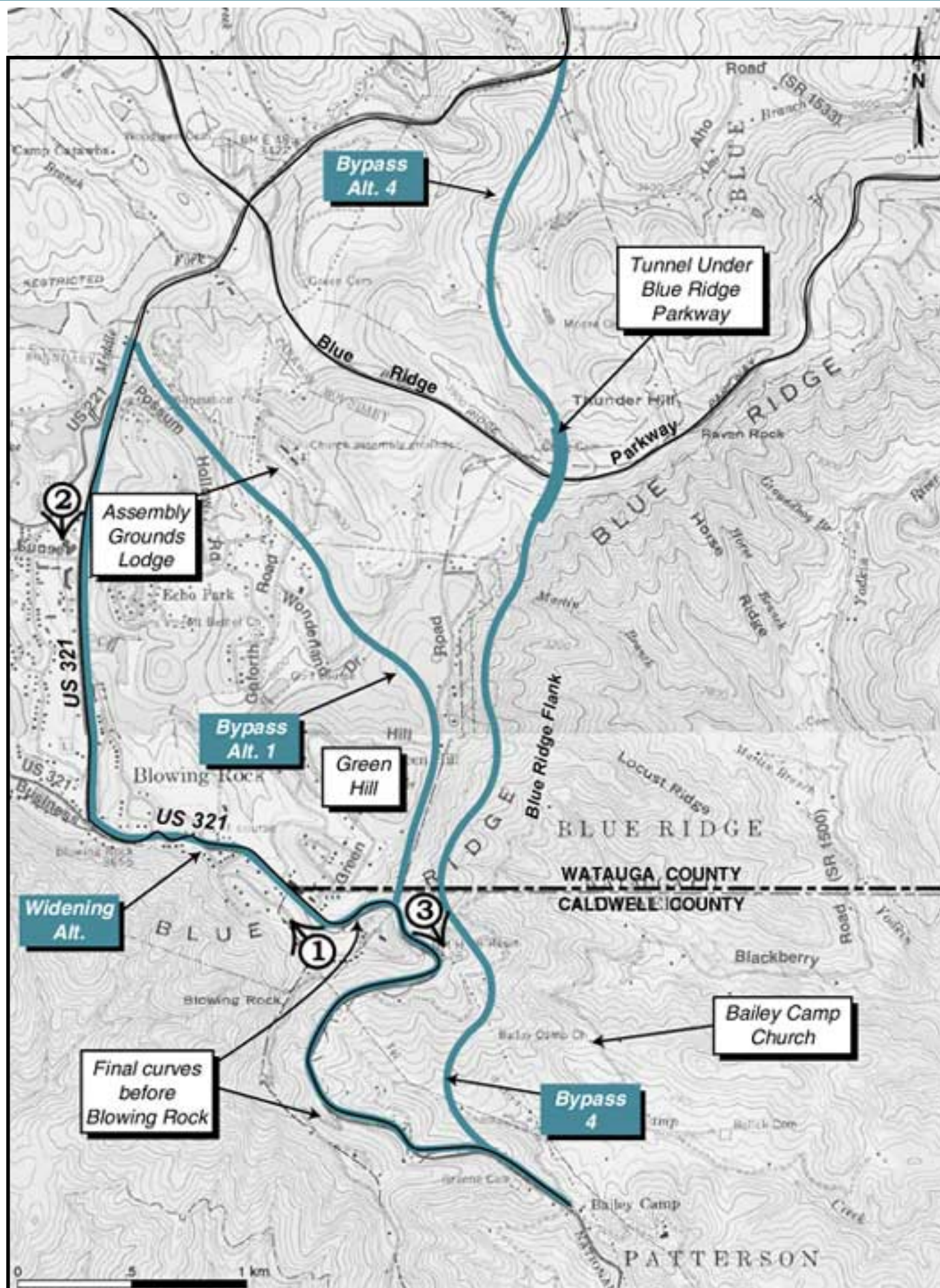
The primary reasons noted by respondents for opposing the enhanced widening were the need to preserve Blowing Rock's village character, historic resource impacts, impacts to homes and businesses along the existing road, economic impacts, safety, fear the project would become obsolete soon, and increased traffic. These concerns were given high priority when the NCDOT made its proposal. The NCDOT remains convinced that a carefully designed enhanced widening of US 321 can address most of these concerns.



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MAP AND RENDERINGS OF ALTERNATIVES



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Photorealistic Renderings of Enhanced Widening Alternative

These renderings were included in the video presented at the March 8 meeting with former Secretary Tolson, the Blowing Rock Town Council, and the Citizens Advisory Committee. Along the existing road, they illustrate and compare the enhanced widening alternative with US 321 today and the customary widening proposed in 1994. The project's computer-aided design files were used in combination with photography to create the renderings. These renderings can be viewed in full color on the project's website.

1 : US 321 at Green Park Inn



Today



2 : Sunset Drive and US 321



Today



Customary Widening

Customary Widening



Example of enhanced widening, including:

- Landscaped median at Green Park In
- Additional rock walls
- Accentuated crosswalk
- Stone curbs
- Period lampposts
- Underground utilities



Example of enhanced widening, including:

- Underground utilities
- Rock walls
- Landscaping

3 : Bypass Alternative 4 below Blackberry



Condominiums

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

Feel Free to Contact the Study Team

If you have any questions or wish to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please call John Page on our toll-free project information line, 1-800-263-2434. You may also write the study team at:

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(This is a new address for Parsons Brinckerhoff.)

You also can communicate your comments via e-mail to BlowingRock321@mail.dot.state.nc.us or visit the project's website at www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/preconstruct/pe/blowingrock321.

Community groups and other stakeholders can arrange a small group meeting with the study team. Smaller groups should consider combining to hold a joint meeting. The organization(s) sponsoring each meeting will be responsible for arranging a meeting site and notifying participants.



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